

A's News Clips, Friday, December 9, 2011

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan to discuss Oakland A's stadium issue today

Oakland Tribune staff report

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan will hold a noon press conference on Friday to address the future of the Oakland A's, KTVU-TV reported.

Quan is expected to discuss a plan for a redesigned Oakland Coliseum complex -- Coliseum City -- that could provide new homes for both the A's and Golden State Warriors.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported Friday that the Warriors have held discussions with San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and Giants CEO Larry Baer about building a new arena near AT&T Park. The Warriors also met with recently Quan about building a new arena at the current Coliseum, according to the Chronicle report.

The Warriors moved from San Francisco to Oakland in 1971 and their current lease at Oracle Arena expires after the 2016-17 season. The arena underwent a complete renovation in the mid-1990s.

There have been indications that the A's will soon hear a decision from Major League Baseball on whether they'll be allowed to pursue a new ballpark in San Jose.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, who nearly three years ago appointed a committee to help decide the A's future home, has recently met with A's officials. He also planned to meet with the San Francisco Giants, who hold territorial rights to San Jose.

Fox Sports reported that during the A's meeting with Selig they gave him assurances it will comply with baseball's request to expand the A's proposed 32,000-seat capacity of proposed Cisco Field in San Jose.

Oakland A's face daunting task in A.L. West after Los Angeles Angels' blockbuster signing of Albert Pujols and C.J. Wilson

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

DALLAS -- As the winter meetings concluded Thursday, the A's watched the division-rival Los Angeles Angels sign three-time N.L. MVP Albert Pujols and left-hander C.J. Wilson for a staggering \$331 million. That's nearly five times more money shelled out for two free agents than the A's spent on their entire 2011 payroll, which was approximately \$67 million.

So with the A.L. West shaping up as a power struggle between the Angels and two-time defending division champ Texas Rangers, where can A's players draw their motivation? Optimism is in short supply as A's management is intent on trading top players and rebuilding for the future.

"It's definitely tough," catcher Kurt Suzuki said. "You look at the Angels, you can compare them to the Yankees now as far as the level of talent and payroll they have. You've just got to prepare yourself. I'm not looking at things any different. I want to win."

As the A's organizational focus shifts to the future, a key will be how those in the clubhouse handle the present. Left-hander Dallas Braden said he doesn't concern himself with how much money the front office is -- or isn't -- spending. He recognizes the odds are stacked against the A's even with spring training more than two months away.

But he said he views the prospect of facing Pujols on a regular basis as more opportunity than anything.

"If I'm on a baseball field with a ball in one hand and a glove on the other, I'm always competitive," Braden said. "He's the type of player that guys measure themselves against."

With the assumption that the A's won't contend in 2012, it offers a challenge for manager Bob Melvin, entering his first full season on the job.

It likely wasn't a coincidence that Suzuki got a call from Melvin on Thursday morning, shortly after news of the Angels' signings broke. Melvin wanted to relay some plans and expectations for spring training, and it was clear to Suzuki that Melvin's focus isn't down the road.

Melvin told reporters on the first day of the winter meetings that he doesn't want to treat the upcoming season like a rebuild.

"We still don't know what our team is going to look like, (but) the guys we do have moving forward I like a lot," Melvin said. "I think if we do things fundamentally sound and we continue to pitch and get better defensively, we're going to win some games."

However, there remains the likelihood that the A's will deal one or more of their top pitchers.

The Arizona Diamondbacks are a potentially good trading partner, and they're interested in starters Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill.

Buster Olney of ESPN.com reported that the teams have discussed a deal involving Cahill going to Arizona for a package that includes right-hander Trevor Bauer, the UCLA product chosen third overall in the 2011 draft.

There was also speculation that A's closer Andrew Bailey could be dealt to the Angels for a package that includes first baseman Mark Trumbo.

But Angels G.M. Jerry Dipoto said he considers Trumbo an option at D.H., third base or the outfield.

The A's did not choose or lose any players in the major league portion of the Rule 5 draft Thursday. Assistant general manager David Forst said the team opted to leave an open spot on its 40-man roster for a player to be obtained via trade or free agency.

A's made no moves, but their universe sure changed

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

On the face of it, the A's left baseball's winter meetings without doing anything.

Really, though, the team laid the groundwork for some major trades, should they opt to move any of their most coveted players, specifically pitchers Gio Gonzalez, Andrew Bailey and Trevor Cahill.

Other developments around the major leagues Thursday might wind up having a direct impact on the A's.

First and foremost is the Angels' 10-year, \$254 million deal with Albert Pujols, which might further prompt Oakland to move its players elsewhere for top prospects. The A's already had assumed they'd have difficulty contending in the AL West - on the first day of the meetings, general manager Billy Beane said the team is behind the other clubs in the division both at the big-league and minor-league levels - and Wednesday the Angels added the game's best hitter in Pujols and a top free-agent starter in C.J. Wilson.

Asked about Pujols' arrival in the AL West, A's assistant general manager David Forst said, "That wasn't my preference."

Elsewhere in the division, Prince Fielder is a realistic option in Seattle, and Texas has made consecutive World Series appearances. If Oakland can't hang with those teams now, pointing toward the future makes sense. So another development might fit into that plan, as surprising as it might sound: Japanese superstar right-hander Yu Darvish was posted Thursday, and the A's weren't among the clubs that denied interest in the 25-year-old.

"We have seen Darvish the last couple of years," Forst said. "There's no secret about his talent."

Oakland would be an unlikely landing spot for Darvish, widely expected to go to a deep-pockets team such as Texas or the Yankees. Darvish's posting fee is expected to be more than \$40 million and his salary demands more than \$50 million.

Said Forst: "We've had the ability to plan for it if it's something we wanted to do."

Perceived interest by some clubs is simply designed to drive up rivals' bids (thus making the competition's payroll balloon), but Darvish, as enormously expensive as he might be, in some respects would fit the profile of the players the A's are now focused on. He is young, and the team would have the ability to sign him well beyond the opening of any new stadium should they get one in the next three years.

Darvish's posting could affect the A's plans in other ways. Gonzalez is the most sought-after player Oakland has to deal, and some of the teams interested in the left-handed All-Star are expected to bid on Darvish, including the Yankees, Rangers and Blue Jays. Teams that lose out on Darvish might go after Gonzalez all the harder. Or, in the case of Toronto especially, a team might look at the \$100 million-plus cost for Darvish and decide that Gonzalez, entering his first year of arbitration and under team control for the next four years, is a far better value.

The Pujols signing also might affect the A's roster directly. There were reports after the Angels landed the first baseman that the A's might try to send Bailey to the Angels for Mark Trumbo, a top Rookie of the Year candidate last year.

"Total fiction," said one well-placed source, and the Angels rushed to stress that they plan to keep Trumbo and use him at designated hitter or third base.

Trumbo, 25, also falls within Oakland's search parameters, with just a year of service time, and the A's first-base situation remains unclear. It wouldn't be surprising if Oakland talked to the Angels about Trumbo at some point over the next year.

Angels, Marlins try to solve problems with cash

Gwen Knapp, Chronicle Columnist

The Angels and Marlins put on quite a show at baseball's winter meetings, tossing around cash like confetti. Buyer's remorse could be a few years away, but it will hit at least one of them, probably as hard as a tumbling boulder.

The nouveau riche Marlins spent presumed bounty from their new park, joining the elite of MLB the way Leonardo DiCaprio came out of steerage to party with the upper crust in "Titanic." The Angels have long been big spenders, typically among the top half-dozen payrolls in the game. But owner Arte Moreno had never been a high roller. He spread the money around on varied talent, rather than betting any contracts worth \$100 million and up on a single player.

For Albert Pujols, Moreno bypassed the entry-level, nine-figure ante and went straight to \$254 million over 10 years.

A year ago, when he lost the bidding for Carl Crawford to Boston's seven-year \$142 million offer, Moreno declared that his team could not drive up the price of its relatively affordable tickets to mimic the Red Sox and Yankees in free agency.

When he splurged this week to sign Pujols and pitcher C.J. Wilson, Moreno still wasn't aiming to become the new George Steinbrenner. He wanted to become the Charlemagne of Southern California baseball.

The Dodgers' kingdom has fallen into the abyss of bankruptcy court. The franchise will rise again, but while it dusts itself off, the Angels have an opening that few businesses ever see. They can advance on an industry icon, and possibly overtake it in the marketplace.

Pujols, in particular, gives Moreno a big selling point in negotiations for a new local TV deal and an unprecedented lure for corporate sponsorship. He renamed the club for that purpose six years ago, creating the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. Now, he has re-branded it, in exactly the way he vowed not to do a year ago.

Wilson's deal, \$77.5 million over five years, seems extravagant. The Pujols contract should be alarming. He will be 32 at the start of the 2012 season, and his body is already rather rickety for 31.

There has long been speculation throughout baseball that Pujols' birth certificate from the Dominican Republic might have shaved a few years off his age. The Giants' ex-managing partner Bill Neukom alluded to that concern a few months ago, when he discussed the conundrum of signing the most potent slugger in the game today.

Like many baseball executives, Neukom didn't define the game's haves and have-nots strictly according to total payroll. The real distinction is between the teams that can absorb long contracts for players likely to be unproductive in the final years and the teams that cannot tolerate that waste.

"The Yankees don't need a first baseman. Nor does Boston. Maybe the Cubs. Maybe the Dodgers," Neukom said on the day he departed from active duty in the Giants' management. "But is there a wealthy team that can afford to do that, say to themselves he could well not be worth it for the last three or four years of a 10-year deal but we can absorb that?"

The Angels have since entered that strata. So have the Marlins, at least temporarily. They got a new stadium from South Florida voters, but the region has yet to prove that it is really baseball country. In a football community, the Marlins may not be able to acquire critical income from broadcasting and sponsorship deals to sustain owner Jeffrey Loria's vision and the \$191 million in deals he made this week for Jose Reyes, Heath Bell and Mark Buehrle.

No team in baseball has been as erratic as the Marlins over the past 15 years. They won two world championships within seven seasons, behind young players from their farm system, then let them go soon after, once in a fit of pique over bad lodging shared with the Dolphins. Only a year ago, the team tried to drum up cash by selling souvenirs of its own humiliation - unused tickets to the game in which the Phillies' Roy Halladay threw a perfect game against the Marlins.

This turnabout, despite the new stadium, is disorienting and disconcerting. If a community marginally supported a modest-payroll, two-time world champion, will some nice real estate make enough difference to pay off that \$191 million?

It's possible that the Marlins and Angels will meet in October for the Commissioner's Trophy. But based on rosters alone, the Phillies, Red Sox and Yankees all looked formidable, if not terrifying, before the first pitch of 2011. None of them lasted past the first round of the playoffs.

Drumbeat: Might Oakland bid on Yu Darvish? And Albert Pujols joins A's division

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Dallas

The winter meetings ended today with the Rule-5 draft, and the A's decided not to add an outfielder, despite lots of outfield openings, because they want to keep roster flexibility for trades or signings.

Which brings us to a hugely unlikely possibility to fill that last spot on the 40-man roster, but one that wasn't exactly shot down by the A's today: Japanese superstar pitcher Yu Darvish.

When asked about Darvish, assistant general manager David Forst said, "We have seen Darvish the last couple of years. There's no secret about his talent."

The A's would be a surprise entrant into the bidding for Darvish, who will be posted today. His posting fee is expected to be \$40-plus million, and he potentially might command as much as \$50-plus million in salary. The A's aren't one of baseball's deep pocket teams, the most they've ever committed to a player is Eric Chavez's \$66 million, and they are looking at three years at or near the bottom of the AL West.

So it's pretty hard to imagine, even if the A's were to sign Darvish long-term as part of their plan to field a competitive team in three or four years when a potential new stadium might be ready. Still, Forst said, "It's no secret he's being posted, and we've had the ability to plan for it if it's something we wanted to do."

The bidding process is secret, and oftentimes, the names of the bidding teams don't come out initially or even at all, especially losers in the bidding process. So we might never know if the A's put in an unsuccessful bid or not. If they were to put in the winning bid, though, everyone would be shocked, but Major League Baseball would sure be happy: The A's open the season in Tokyo, and Darvish is the top current draw in Japan.

Oakland lost a player in the minor-league portion of the Rule-5 draft today, left-handed starter Fabian Williamson. Williamson, 23, had been acquired from Boston for Eric Patterson in 2010.

Strangely, that was not the big transaction of the day. People seemed to be far more interested in Albert Pujols signing a 10-year, \$250-million deal with the Angels.

I asked Forst about Pujols joining the division, and he said wryly, "That wasn't my preference."

There is a potential trickle-down effect: The Angels had a Rookie of the Year candidate at first base in Mark Trumbo, and the A's already have been linked to him. Melissa Lockard of Scout.com said she's hearing Trumbo to the A's for Andrew Bailey, which makes sense on several levels, because Oakland is unsettled at first base and Trumbo has only one year of service time, which fits into the A's parameters for additions.

I spoke to a reliable Angels source who told me he is not hearing anything about Trumbo for Bailey and he was anticipating that the Angels would be quiet for awhile. After signing Pujols, the Angels also added C.J. Wilson on a five-year, \$77.5 million deal. "I'm pretty sure we're done for the day," he said.

UPDATE: I just checked with another well-placed source and was told that any thought of Bailey-for-Trumbo is "total fiction."

As I tweeted late last night (@susanslusser), the most likely teams to sign A's free agent Josh Willingham are down to: Colorado, Minnesota and Cleveland. I think the Indians have the best shot, really: Colorado has concerns about Willingham's ability to play in the outfield every day, the Twins might re-sign Michael Cuddyer.

A's leave quietly, but could have deals in works

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

DALLAS -- Though speculation surrounding a trade involving one of their big names was rampant at the Winter Meetings this week, the A's quietly exited Dallas on Thursday.

Oakland fans perhaps view this as good news, considering it means All-Star pitchers Gio Gonzalez and Andrew Bailey - who resided in the middle of such talks -- are still employed by the A's.

But any relief that came with that was likely met with a big sigh when news of a certain division foe's spending splurge broke through Thursday morning. The Angels' signing of not only nine-time All-Star and three-time National League Most Valuable Player Albert Pujols, but familiar face C.J. Wilson only further magnified the catchup journey facing the A's.

"I can't handicap what this means for the Angels," A's assistant general manager David Forst said, "but certainly when you end up with all the best players in the game in your division, that's not what you want."

Pujols signed for 10 years, Wilson for five, meaning the Angels will likely hang around fellow threat Texas at the top of the American League West for years to come. The A's, meanwhile, are embarking on a rebuilding process -- they have yet to firmly define their direction as such, but their actions make it no secret.

They entered the Winter Meetings already having essentially lost the likes of Josh Willingham, David DeJesus and Coco Crisp. They also prepared to let Gonzalez or Bailey go if offered a hefty return package involving players that could help them open a new stadium in San Jose, which they're hoping to gain approval for as early as January. But the A's didn't budge in four days at the Hilton Anatole, instead electing to remain patient.

"There's no mandate to trade guys," Forst said this week. "We happen to have guys who are valuable, who have the potential to bring back players. But if you don't trade them now, and you sit here 12 months from now, they're still under control."

Bailey isn't a free agent until the conclusion of the 2014 season, while Gonzalez remains under club control through '15. Moreover, both are young and of high value, leaving little surprise that multiple clubs -- think double digits -- have inquired on both. Oakland has also received calls on more than one of its other pitchers.

"I think we're further along in our discussions and in the process than we were on Sunday," Forst said.

A deal or two, then, still isn't out of the question. The Blue Jays, D-backs and Nationals are the most recent teams to join the hunt for Gonzalez, while Bailey is likely to continue drawing interest from the Red Sox and, perhaps, the Angels, among other clubs seeking a closer.

Expect the A's to keep the lines open until the start of Spring Training, by which point they'll also need to have a better idea of what their outfield and lineup will look like to complement a premier starting staff that may or may not include Gonzalez.

Deals done: None

Rule 5 activity: Lost LHP Fabian Williamson to the Rangers

Goals accomplished: When a team exits the Winter Meetings without having made a deal, initial thinking may assume that nothing was achieved. But the A's don't see it that way. Sure, they leave Dallas with the same roster, but also with a deeper knowledge of the market -- and perhaps a future trade partner.

Unfinished business: Plenty. The A's may be on a spending hold because of their stadium situation, but they're still going to have to find a way to fill their outfield. Watch for them to wait out the market and examine a couple of low-cost free-agent options later in the winter should they not find a way via trades.

GM's bottom line: "We have a good, young pitching staff -- not just the obvious guys, but if you look beyond that. So there's been a pretty high level of interest in most of our guys on the Major League staff, as you would expect -- some more than others." -- *Billy Beane*

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